

## Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District OKs \$6.4M in cuts

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Posted: 02/24/2012 01:03:19 AM PST

Noting the state's budget picture will change in the coming months, Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District leaders -- in order to meet a mandated March deadline and to prepare for a "worst-case scenario" -- voted to approve \$6.4 million in cuts for the 2012-13 school year, including the closure of two schools but excluding the suspension of kindergarten for one year.

Advance word that the seven trustees would consider eliminating kindergarten, with its loss of 60 full-time teachers, for a savings of \$3.7 million, drew an overflow crowd to district offices Thursday in Fairfield.

But at the outset of the 6 p.m. meeting, trustee David Isom announced that eliminating kindergarten would not be discussed, much to the relief of several parents, who got up and left the room.

After nearly three hours of public comment, the board voted 6-1, with trustee Pat Shamansky dissenting, to consider Option C, the third of several options -- each of them "deplorable," said Superintendent Jacki Cottingim-Dias -- in order to meet a March deadline, when district officials, as required by law, must submit a balanced budget to the County Office of Education.

In her opening remarks at the meeting, before public comment, Cottingim-Dias said the deadline forced the proposed reductions, some of which or all "may be unnecessary," depending on the outcome of the Nov. 6 election, which will include two tax measures proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown. One calls for raising the income tax on

those who earn more than \$250,000 per year, the

other boosts the state sales tax by a half cent.

But as other area district superintendents have noted, Cottingim-Dias said voters may reject the measures, which would immediately slash some \$4.8 billion from public education, or about three weeks of classes.

She noted FSUSD administrators, staff and trustees were "deeply sorry that the Legislature caused disruption to the district," as it did last year, when tax revenues fell short again, requiring sacrifices among employees.

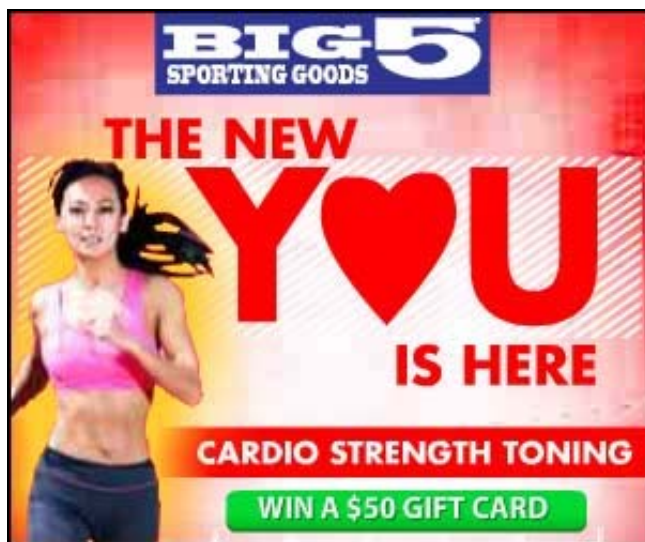
"No one on this board wants to make any cuts on this page," Cottingim-Dias said, referring to the detailed list of options.

She encouraged parents and concerned citizens to send e-mails and letters, stating their opinions and reactions to proposed budget cuts, to all state legislators, not just their local representatives in Sacramento.

For the time being, the cuts would be necessary, she said, depending on the governor's May revision and the Legislature's final budget, which is due by July 1.

Among the first speakers was the Rev. Todd Bertani, the father of two children in district schools, saying the district faced "a wide breach" that was not the fault of board members.

Quoting "repair the breach" from the Book of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible, he said "the community needs





to make a stand" about the proposed cuts.

During her comments to the board, Kathy Rollins, a labor relations representative for the California School Employees Association, reminded the trustees that they cannot vote to eliminate positions without prior negotiations.

In an interview before the meeting, Melanie Driver, president of the FSUSD Teachers Association, asserted all the cuts were "not acceptable," but agreed the board must prepare a "worst-case scenario" budget in light of uncertain revenues during a fragile economic recovery and a state struggling with a massive home foreclosure crisis.

"We are in jeopardy," said Driver.

Several speakers mentioned that the board must reconsider its priorities, not eliminate programs that would minimize a quality education for the district's 22,000 students or close schools.

In the end, however, trustee Perry Polk said the district, under Option C, would likely consider closing an elementary and middle school, for a savings of \$1.2 million, but spare the closure of a high school in order to balance the 2012-13 budget.

Before the vote, he also noted that it may be necessary to eliminate some school improvement block grant funding, by nearly \$900,000, and reduce discretionary allocations, by some \$623,000.

The Gifted and Talent Education and some of the Adult Education programs and athletic stipends (pay for coaches), to the tune of nearly \$1.2 million, would also be on the chopping block, under Option C, he noted.

"We are at a point where we need community help," to fund the schools, said Perry, saying it was the board's responsibility to make the "distasteful" cuts.

Saying it was a "matter of conscience" to her, Shamansky, the lone dissenting vote, said the trustees needed "to think about the unintended consequences" of their actions, which may include eliminating some school counselors.

The trustees meet again on March 8 at the district offices, 2490 Hilborn Road, Fairfield.

